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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet discusses the Modesto Plan, a program designed in 1976 by the Modesto (California) city schools to restore educational standards and public confidence. The school system's statement of principles is defined first, followed by a lengthy discussion of the major elements of the program--academic expectations and student behavior. Specifics for dealing with problems in these areas are then examined in detail. (Author/LD)

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The Restoration of Standards: The Modesto Plan

James C. Enochs

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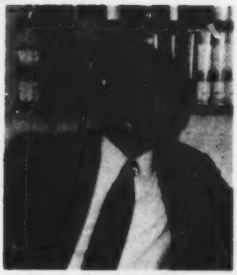

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The Restoration of Standards: The Modesto Plan

By James C. Enochs

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In the Docket

It is time to admit it: In the last dozen years, educators have made a mess of things. The evidence against us is overwhelming. When children are safer on the streets than in their schools, when we are spending more on vandalism than on textbooks, and when we are clothing functional illiterates in caps and gowns, the time has come to start plea bargaining. We are guilty.

To be sure, we have had our share of accomplices: critics who gleefully searched out every problem that confirmed their notion that the schools were rotten; the media and talk show hosts who were buying doomsday stuff; pop psychologists who convinced us that grades and competition were responsible for everything from bed wetting to the military/industrial complex; social engineers who turned the schools into battering rams for their latest experiments; and innovation hustlers with hardware, software, and a copy of the latest Elementary-Secondary Education Act funding proposal. Most of them have gone on to more lucrative fields, leaving us to stand alone in the docket.

There is little we can offer in our defense. After all, many of us went along. In the name of innovation and relevancy, we suspended our better judgment. Rather than be thought rigid in a period when flexibility was the highest virtue, we first relaxed our standards and then abolished them completely. We began to feel guilty and proceeded to pull up our roots to examine them for rot. Homework, honest grading, demanding courses, required classes, earned promotion—up they came and out they went. We leveled the field so all could pass through without labor or frustration.

The result was an egalitarianism so ill conceived as, in Kierkegaard's phrase, to be "unrelieved by even the smallest eminence." Because odious distinctions were being made in the larger society around us, we drew back in horror from making any distinctions. Intelligence tests were suddenly suspect because some legal aid lawyers charged they were "culturally biased." Ability grouping became known as undemocratic stereotyping. Grading was referred to as an arbitrary system of rewards and punishments meted out by authoritarian teachers. Retention was only one more sign of our inhumanity.

In sorting through the professional literature of the time, one finds elaborate, jargon-filled justifications for all of this. The pages are peppered with "scholarly" footnotes calling to witness the gurus of the day: John Holt, Herbert Kohl, A. S. Neill, Jonathan Kozol, Edgar Z. Friedenberg, and others—most of whom had fled the public schools or were comfortably ensconced in the towers of higher education. Their arguments were seductive because we all yearned to be so certain, so righteous, and so "with it."

But there was an even more appealing element in their siren call, a kind of hidden melody that we could never publicly acknowledge: It was all simply easier that way. If there were no standardized bench marks against which to be measured, there was no accountability. The tough, time-consuming process of monitoring—teachers monitoring students, principals monitoring teachers, superintendents monitoring principals—was lifted from our shoulders. There were fewer decisions to be made, judgments to be weighed, and stands to be taken. Yes is always easier to say than no. Something called the "affective domain" became the cloak of decency for lazy teachers and administrators. It was easier to make students feel good than to hold them accountable to the rigors of learning. "Rapping" replaced writing (and the need to correct essays), and the classics were shelved and the movie projectors switched on (Shakespeare wasn't relevant and Dickens was boring). Required history courses gave way to social science electives sliced into meaningless pieces like so much salami (nay, bologna).

Grades became bloated and revealed more about the teachers who gave them and the principals who tolerated them than the students who received them. "Social promotion" and unearned diplomas

moved undeserving students up and out of a system that had failed them but, in a final act of conscience, compensated them with counterfeit paper.

All of this, and much more, represents an abrogation of responsibility. It is professional infidelity. Irving Kristol has said it best: "When educators say that they don't know what kind of human beings they are trying to create, they have surrendered all claim to legitimate authority."

Some people are trying to find a more palatable explanation for the general disillusionment with schools and the frantic scurrying about to reform them. We have not read the last article by an education professor ready to give us the comforting reassurance that this "back-to-basics talk is merely one more swing of the educational pendulum." Straight-faced superintendents are insisting that their school districts never departed from a commitment to basic education, and national and local leaders of teachers associations continue to absolve their dues-paying members of all responsibility while, in the same breath, arguing that the public gets the kind of education it pays for.

We are left to choose. Perhaps the professor is right in thinking that if we just sit tight the pendulum will be back in a few years and we will be vindicated. Perhaps the unsmiling superintendents know whereof they speak and we really are doing all that can be done. Or, it may be true that if we simply pay teachers more they will correct that for which they claim no responsibility.

I choose to think we had best be about the work of restoring standards—and our credibility.

The Best Kept Secret in America

> The best kept secret in America today is that people would rather work hard for something they believe in than enjoy a pampered idleness.
>
> John W. Garner, *No Easy Victories*

The restoration of standards is as much a matter of attitude as of program. There are few things more demoralizing than serving an institution that mocks one's highest personal values. It transforms initiative into impotence and dedication into resignation. It turns professionals who care about their clients into clock-punchers who care only about themselves. There is no other profession in which the potential for satisfaction and fulfillment is as great as in education—nor the opportunities for boondoggling so unlimited. If teachers are willing to give their primary loyalty to union leadership, then the satisfactions of a dedicated profession have become the dull drudgeries of menial labor, and all that is left is salary and fringe.

Most collective bargaining contracts make dreary reading. The majority of them can be summarized quite succinctly: How little do I have to do for as much as I can get? Contracts have been negotiated with the provision that teachers do *not* have to attend PTA meetings in the evening. And then the teachers wonder why the parents no longer support the schools as they once did.

It seems a cruel paradox that people stop caring when they believe their efforts no longer make a difference, and they can only make a difference if they continue to care. But paradoxes are often of our own making, and they disintegrate under the force of a little honest introspection. Before one accepts the proposition that one's efforts are in

vain, one had better be sure that the efforts are all they should be. More than a century ago, the English philosopher John Ruskin wrote that teaching is "difficult work to be done by kindness, by watching, by warning, by precept, and by praise, but above all, by example." That is a demanding definition, but it is not beyond the reach of most teachers. It does require sufficient grit to break with those colleagues who seem to revel in their impotence.

The importance of attitude emerged as the most significant teacher attribute affecting classroom outcomes in a recent Rand study of federal programs. The authors found that, "The teacher's sense of efficacy—a belief that the teacher can help even the most difficult or unmotivated students—showed strong positive effects on all the [classroom level] outcomes." But, one wonders, are there enough efficacious teachers left to get the job done? The Rand study field experience "... suggests that staff development activities could be used to raise the sense of efficacy and rekindle the enthusiasm of many teachers."

Seldom have those been the goals of staff development programs. It has been easier to send a few teachers to workshops, bring in a consultant, and approve meaningless graduate units for salary schedule advancement. Yet everything we know about the life and death of institutions tells us, as John Gardner puts it, "Organizations go to seed when the people in them go to seed. And they awaken when the people awaken. The renewal of organizations and societies starts with people."

Administrators have been similarly affected. A kind of shamefaced defeatism has pervaded school administration. Early retirement has become a favorite topic of conversation: "How long do you have to go? Lord, how I envy you." The subject of retirement has become focus of popular workshops at administrators' conventions. School administrators are like shell-shocked GIs counting up their points for discharge.

More and more decisions are predicated on the anticipated response of pressure groups (the teachers, classified employees, counselors) than on the anticipated benefits for children. A whole new lexicon for passing the buck has sprung up: shared decision making, conflict resolution, and participatory management. If, like those *New Yorker* car-

toons, a Martian ever lands in the middle of an American school system and says, "Take me to your leader," he is unlikely to have a close encounter with anyone.

It is a thesis now beyond testing, but perhaps if teachers had had strong leadership from their administrators, they would not have turned elsewhere for it.

Educators are faced with a very real dilemma: The very qualities and attitudes needed to restore the schools have been transformed in a manner guaranteed to perpetuate the decline. But it is far from an absolute dilemma. If it is correct that the demoralization of teachers and administrators grows out of their service to an institution at odds with their personal values, they must be made to see that they have a *common* interest in restoring those institutional values that originally attracted them to education. This is not as difficult as it seems. (For those searching for exceptions to every generalization, I concede that dull, lazy, and incompetent teachers and administrators will never care enough to change. However, for the same reasons, they will never be able to prevent change.)

As a social problem, the decline of educational standards is unique. Unlike most social problems, there is no one with a vested interest in its continuation. While I have heard people argue the "other side" of racial integration, conservation, women's rights, the arms race, and even poverty, I have yet to hear anyone try to make a case for bad schools. To be sure, some people care more than others. But those who care most are the very people with whom we work: teachers, administrators, parents with school-age children, and the children themselves. These groups will continue to pursue their special interests—which are often conflicting—but they can be held on course to their common interest in good schools. And that is the road up and out of our dilemma. It is also a task requiring leadership.

Leadership

James MacGregor Burns, in his new book *Leadership*, has clearly defined the role. "Leadership," he writes, "is the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and

conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by leaders and followers." The process involves some trade-offs. None but the incurable romantics expect people to set aside their self-interests; and none but the world-weary cynics expect people to be incapable of anything but self-interests. It is, instead, a more practical matter of linking the satisfaction of self-interests to the attainment of higher, less selfish goals. The former cannot be realized without the latter—at least not over the long term.

It is incredibly naive to believe that taxpayers will continue to provide the level of support necessary to satisfy even the reasonable self-interests of educators if the schools are bad. The average American's patience for paying inflated prices for shoddy merchandise has its limits. Nor will taxpayers indefinitely tolerate slowdowns or strikes. In education, power is a poor substitute for excellence.

Beleagured school boards might be more responsive to demands for higher salaries if they could face their constituents with evidence that the salaries were justified. If administrators work longer and harder than teachers, take more risks, and have the courage to defend teachers when they are right, the teachers will begrudge them neither their salaries nor their existence. And if superintendents refuse to compromise away the higher goals in order to deliver on the special demands of the most powerful or vocal element, they may find that by elevating the system as a whole, they have carried all factions beyond their narrow interests. They may also find that they are no longer seen as "politicians," but rather as leaders.

Burns calls this "transforming leadership." He writes, "Leaders can also shape and alter and elevate the motives and values and goals of followers through the vital *teaching* role of leadership. . . . The premise of this leadership is that, whatever the separate interests persons might hold, they are presently or potentially united in the pursuit of 'higher' goals, the realization of which is tested by the achievement of significant change that represents the collective or pooled interests of leaders and followers."

And finally, there is mutual accountability and rewards, a principle that must be built into the educational program (see pp. 18-25, A Modest Proposal). There is presently far too much finger pointing in

education. Colleges blame the high schools for sending them students without basic skills. High school teachers blame junior high school teachers, junior high school teachers blame elementary teachers, and they, in turn, blame the parents (or, those who have had sociology, blame "society"). If you like these "This-is-the-house-that-Jack-built" stories, they go on: The parents blame the board of education who blames the superintendent who blames the principals who blame the teachers—and the circle of irresponsibility is closed. But if there is a common commitment to restoring the standards of excellence to the schools, it will happen. We should stop pointing and join hands. If there is a common enterprise beneficial to all, and if there is mutual dependency, as Burns says, "their fortunes rise and fall together, [and] they share the results of planned change together."

The Key Role of the Principal

principal, *n.* A person who has controlling authority or is in a leading position; a leading performer.

Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary

While many elements can contribute to the restoration of standards, there is substantial evidence that the principal plays a key role. In *Toward Equal Educational Opportunity* (a report of the Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity), the pivotal role of the principal is highlighted: "It is the principal's leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for learning, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become. . . . If a school . . . has a reputation for excellence in teaching, if students are performing to the best of their ability, one can almost point to the principal's leadership as the key to success." In California a "School Effectiveness Study" by the State Department of Education concluded, "that at schools where student achievement is higher than might be expected, principals provided strong leadership and support." A similar conclusion can be found in *The School Principal: Recommendations for Effective Leadership*, a study by the California Assembly Education Committee: "Principal leadership is directly related to pupil achievement, pupil attitudes toward self and school, teacher morale, and parent satisfaction."

In a fascinating study titled "Patterns of Black Excellence" (*The Public Interest*, Spring 1976), Thomas Sowell reported on six black high schools and two elementary schools noted for consistent educa-

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tional excellence. In all these schools Sowell found some common denominators: law and order, emphasis on basic education with strict academic standards, tracking by academic ability, and the character and ability of principals.

Sowell found that "some [of the principals] were of heroic dimensions . . . and others were simply dedicated educators." He heard no talk of public relations or educational clichés from these people. Instead, they were on fire with a drive to achieve excellence in their schools. If the test scores slipped, they did not fall back on the threadbare justifications about the questionable validity of the test or the socioeconomic composition of the student body. No. They said we must do better. We have to work harder. As one principal said, "Even though you are pushing for them, and dying inside for them, you have to let them know that they have to produce."

Sowell reports that in one of these schools the principal's "inexperience and lack of familiarity with educational fashions paid off handsomely." The man had probably never heard of Herbert Kohl or John Holt; or if he had, he had the good sense to ignore them. As a result, little St. Augustine High in New Orleans with 700 students has produced more finalists and semifinalists in the National Achievement Scholarship program for black students than any other school in the nation. Sowell cites a study of unusually successful ghetto schools in New York that found that "the quality and attitude of the administrator seemed to be the only real difference" between these schools and the less successful ones.

All this translates into a need for principals with high expectations for students, teachers, and themselves. School leadership should be an act of elevation: the elevation of standards, performance, and satisfaction. It is an old axiom that we cannot expect more in performance or commitment from others than we are willing to deliver. But there is a tendency among educators to be excessively tolerant of mediocrity. We allow people to substitute effort for results. We are justly famous for fashioning "process" objectives rather than "product" objectives. The mythical Sisyphus in Hades was condemned forever to roll a great stone up a hill only to have it roll down again on nearing the top. Up and down he goes for all eternity. He can never get the stone to stick.

By most school evaluation standards, Sisyphus would be judged a success.

Perhaps the fraternal nature of our profession is a barrier to effective leadership. Long-standing relationships and personal familiarity increase the temptation to look the other way or put off tough personnel decisions. Objectivity suffers in the process. Popularity and affection become more important than productivity and effectiveness. Individuals who yearn to be loved on a day-to-day basis should be discouraged from entering administration.

While this is not the place for a long discussion of the essential qualities of leadership, I suspect that there is not nearly as much doubt about what those qualities are as some would have us believe. When we wish to excuse a failing we first contrive to make it seem impossibly complex. Leadership, like beauty, may be hard to define, but we know it when we see it. And we are not seeing enough of it in the nation's public schools.

A Modest Proposal

Early in 1976 the Modesto (California) City Schools embarked on a program designed to restore educational standards—and the confidence of our clients. The program, "Academic Expectations and the Fourth R: Responsibility," was not offered, nor is it here offered, as a cleverly innovative panacea. It was a modest proposal to get back on the high road from which we strayed in the mid-1960s. Most of the components, we unblushingly conceded, represented a return to some fundamentals we should never have abandoned. The program also anticipated by a year or two some national trends and legislatively mandated state programs.

We began in what may seem to some an unorthodox manner. We publicly documented our shortcomings. More specifically, we framed the issue as follows:

1. The incidence of conflict, disruption, and crime in the nation's public schools is growing at an alarming rate. This has been accompanied by a steady decline in academic performance of students.
2. The public is becoming increasingly concerned.
3. There is no reason to believe that Modesto will be exempt from either the problems or the reaction.

We then proceeded to provide data that verified that, in fact, item 3 was virtually upon us.

We followed with a statement of principles; a straightforward redefinition of what we believed in and stood for. It was our scaled down version of the 95 Theses nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Church by

Martin Luther. Our less ambitious reformation began, in effect, by nailing our Eight Theses to the schoolhouse doors in Modesto.

An examination of those statements may give the reader a sense of the tone we wished to set.

1. *It is essential that a public institution clearly define itself; to say unequivocally what it believes in and stands for.*

Surely it makes sense to begin here. In many school districts there is considerable confusion—not just in the public's mind, but among educators themselves—over this matter of what we are about. But if the public is confused about what the schools are doing, they are much more certain about what they want the schools to do. We took as a starting point the 1976 Gallup Poll on education (and there has been little change in the subsequent polls):

- 84% of those with children in school favored instruction in morals and moral behavior;
- 55% would send their children to schools with strict discipline codes and strong emphasis on the three Rs;
- 54% didn't think students were required to work hard enough;
- 96% favored high school graduation requirements that demand that a student be able to read well enough to follow an instruction manual, write a letter of application using correct grammar and spelling, and know enough arithmetic to be able to figure out such problems as the total square feet in a room.

We decided to tackle these issues as a starting point because we believed they were right and because they were supported by the public, whose support you need in any reform effort. Finally, we accepted these views for a very practical reason: Those people who want moral instruction, basic skills, and discipline are the same people who pay the bills. At a time when there is little data to prove that the professionals know best, it is a risky proposition to assume that the people who are paying for education don't know what they are talking about. It is a worthwhile exercise to remind ourselves occasionally that the schools belong to the people.

While definitions will vary among school districts, we confirmed the results of the national Gallup poll by sampling the attitudes of parents within our own district. But whatever the definition, its par-

ticulars should be spelled out in plain English. It does little to advance public understanding to call buses *mobile learning modules* or field trips *experiential interfacing with the environment.* Once the definitions are set, they should be laid out publicly at the beginning of each school year by the superintendent, with the board braced and cheering at his side:

This is our program.

This is what we expect in behavior and academic performance.

This is what happens to those who meet our standards.

This is what happens to those who fail to meet our standards.

At mid-year we'll tell you how we are doing.

At the end of the year we'll tell you how we did, as a district and at each school.

These are the people who are in charge, at the district level and at each school.

This process not only defines the institution for its clients, but for its employees as well. It does not preclude other goals for teachers and administrators, but it clearly establishes that those goals must be in addition to, not in lieu of, the district's goals.

2. *The development of responsible adults is a task requiring community commitment. It cannot be left solely to the public schools.*

We felt it necessary to remind the community that the schools are not the only public institution receiving tax dollars for the purpose of helping children. In too many communities there is little cooperation and coordination among social agencies. On the contrary, there is considerable backbiting, buck-passing, and open hostility. Many district attorneys believe they have better things to do than prosecute juvenile offenders or parents who refuse to send their children to school. *Time* magazine concluded that the juvenile justice system was "a sieve through which most . . . kids come and go with neither punishment nor rehabilitation." Probation officers, mental health agents, and social workers have little contact with the schools beyond informing them that the responsibility for "supervision" is being returned to the schools.

A study conducted in the metropolitan Portland (Oregon) area demonstrates this breakdown. The report concluded: "The juvenile court system is especially criticized as an institution that deals impotently with severe offenders and succeeds in convincing juveniles that they have certain rights that carry no commensurate responsibilities. County social agencies such as counselors and juvenile homes were given low confidence ratings. Part of the social agency ineffectiveness was charged to lack of consistent and conscientious contact with the schools."

Our intention was not to shift responsibility but to insist upon shared responsibility in some areas. Nor was it self-serving. There is evidence that more than one community goal is served by such cooperation. In Alexandria, Virginia, the school system, the district attorney's office, and the police department initiated a program in which police officers searched shopping centers, parking lots, and residential streets for truants. During the first 18 school days, 51 students were picked up. In each case, the students were returned to school, the parents were notified, and a record made by school officials. The district attorney said that if a student was picked up three times, charges would be filed against the student and his parents. During that short period, school truancy dropped from 8% to 3% in the secondary schools. And, pleasant surprise, break-ins and shoplifting declined significantly in the city. All that was required was a degree of cooperation and, it might be added, adults acting like adults in the face of children flaunting the law.

On a different level, we were challenging the community to provide recognition to outstanding students. In many communities such recognition is limited to star athletes. The glory showered upon them conveys, intentionally or not, the message that Saturday's hero is more important than the Monday-through-Friday scholar and good citizen. The impressionable young must not be left with the idea that a majority of adults believe that is so. We found a number of community leaders anxious to help. Just one example: The editor of the local newspaper now provides a regular weekly column listing outstanding stu-

dent achievement in speech, art, music, academic performance, student government, attendance, school service, and other areas.

3. *The principal tasks of the public schools cannot be achieved if a disproportionate amount of time and resources must be given to maintaining order. Public schools are not obliged to serve students who, through persistent and serious acts, disrupt school and violate the rights of others.*

It should be kept in mind that we said "serious and persistent acts." But with only that caveat, we wanted it clearly understood that there comes a point at which the schools must be able to say, "These few make it impossible to teach the many. They must go." Until the police are expected to teach reading, teachers should not be expected to deal with criminals. Lest you think that statement overly harsh, examine any recent FBI report: $600 million a year in school vandalism; 70,000 serious assaults on teachers each year (and many thousands more on students); and more than half of all serious crimes in the U.S. committed by youth aged 10 to 17.

There has been a good deal of cant about "serving the needs of all youngsters." The schools never did, and to continue the pretense that they do will only keep us from "serving the needs" of *most* of the youngsters.

4. *Parents must consistently support the proposition that students have responsibilities as well as rights, and schools have an obligation to insist upon both.*

When parents are suing schools to force the promotion of kindergartners, it is time for a little perspective. In examining sample codes of students' rights and responsibilities provided by the Center for Law and Education at Harvard, we found an interesting consistency. Virtually every code had a specific and comprehensive compendium of student rights, including detailed appeal procedures and committee structure. The section on student responsibilities was often no more than a single paragraph written in general terms: "Student rights also entail responsibilities"; "Responsibility is inherent in the exercise of every right." We thought a greater degree of specificity and balance was in order.

5. *High performance takes place in a framework of expectations.*

It is a useful proposition to let people know what is expected of them. No one has made this case more persuasively than John W. Gardner. In *Excellence*, he writes:

> Standards are contagious. They spread throughout an organization, a group, or a society. If an organization or group cherishes high standards, the behavior of individuals who enter it is inevitably influenced. Similarly, if slovenliness infects a society, it is not easy for any member of that society to remain uninfluenced in his own behavior.

It is equally important that there be no confusion about the consequences of failure to meet those expectations. If sloth and diligence, if mediocrity and excellence, if disrespect and civility are not received with significantly different consequences, the distinctions between them will soon be lost on impressionable minds. Standards without rewards and consequences are not standards at all. So the trick is not only to set standards, but, from top to bottom, to have the integrity and courage to enforce them.

6. *The full responsibility for learning cannot be transferred from the student to the teacher.*

This seemed to us a necessary antidote to the twaddle of the mid-Sixties and early Seventies that sought to excuse every youthful excess as a failure of the "system" to respond to student needs. All failure became institutional failure, conveniently absolving students (and many adult collaborators) of individual responsibility. Any idea or book that was difficult to master was dismissed as "boring" or "irrelevant." It seemed never to occur to some that children are not the best qualified judges of which aspects of human experience and knowledge are relevant. It is one thing for the record industry and television to pander to the young; it is quite another thing for educators to do so. Joseph Wood Krutch, in his autobiography, *More Lives Than One*, tells the story of a fiercely independent English professor at Columbia who had the right idea. His final examination consisted of two questions written on the blackboard. The first question was, "Which of the required readings in this course did you find least interesting?" After giving the class adequate time to demolish such a congenial topic, he wrote the second question

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on the blackboard: "To what defect in yourself do you attribute this lack of interest?"

At a more subtle level there is a persistent confusion between the right of educational opportunity and the right to an education. While the schools can extend educational opportunity to all, they cannot confer an education on anyone. The individual has the responsibility to make the most of the opportunity. If he does not, we must not allow him to charge us with denying his "rights."

7. *There is nothing inherently undemocratic in requiring students to do things that are demonstrably beneficial to them.*

This was intended merely as a little reassurance for those teachers and administrators who had remained faithful to their calling. It was necessary to establish that we understood the difference between "authority" and the charge of "authoritarianism" leveled against such people by irresponsible critics. Authoritarianism is an extreme; as is permissiveness. By definition, authority is "the exercise of power toward some morally affirmed end and in such a reasonable way as to secure legitimacy through popular acceptance and sanction."

On the other hand, we wanted to signal clearly that we did not count it an impulse to decency or democracy to allow children to "do their own thing."

8. *In order for a program to succeed, it must be kept in place for a reasonable period of time and be assured of continued support, despite periodic criticism and the lure of faddishness.*

We expected criticism from those with honest concerns about the direction we were taking as well as those who greet any new example of common sense with incredulity. We asked only for half as much time to succeed as had been granted to the previous "innovations" before they were conceded to have failed.

These were the principles upon which we intended to build a program. As it turned out, with some minor additions and modifications, they became the "Ten Commandments" upon which the Rev. Jesse Jackson advanced his EXCEL program in 1976. It was a gift we were happy to extend to this national program. In return we found that the statements had taken on an aura of legitimacy. William Raspberry discussed them on the editorial page of the *Washington Post* as "com-

mon sense things . . . deserving of wider circulation." Jackson repeated them in his own syndicated column and credited their source. As the program began to evolve, we were visited by reporters from the *Christian Science Monitor, New York Times*, Associated Press, and CBS News. This did wonders for the confidence of the "locals" who seem always to need reminding that taking the lead can be invigorating, heady stuff.

Next came program, the machinery that often defeats us.

Academic Expectations and the Fourth R: Responsibility

The entire program was an "inside job." While we claimed no originality of ideas (individual pieces of the program either had been or were being used elsewhere), the combination of elements and the details were our own. From the first broad proposals to the final approval of every competency question, the total staff had the opportunity to propose, nullify, or modify. Obviously, not everyone agreed. Certain elements of the program were dropped because of the level of opposition. Only those that received strong majority approval were developed and implemented. Fortunately, those that survived were the heart of the program. And, interestingly, the administration did not have to work very hard to sell them. (This may serve as one small test case to prove the earlier assertion that most teachers welcome leadership directed toward a higher goal.)

The major elements of the program are presented here, as they were to our staff and community, in two parts: "Academic Expectations" dealing with subject matter and "The Fourth R: Responsibility" dealing with student behavior.

Academic Expectations

A Basic-Skills Competency Plan, Grades K through 8

Minimum competencies in math, reading, and writing were established for each grade level. We were careful to define *minimum competencies* as "the lowest acceptable level of attainment required for reasonable progress at the next grade level." While there are certainly

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other definitions, this one carried the message we wanted to convey to students and parents: Unless you have at least these skills, you can't make it in a higher grade next year ("No know, no go"). It also made it easier for teachers to agree on the competency statements. The "temptation" to set the competencies too low was offset by a natural system of checks and balances. The sixth-grade teachers told the fifth-grade teachers, "You can't send me a kid unless he knows. . . ." And the fourth-grade teachers told the third-grade teachers, and so on.

The competencies were written as specific skills or knowledge. No numerically stated grade-level equivalents were used (based on our experience that indicates that parents prefer to know what their child can read rather than being told he is reading at 3.2). We worked hard at stripping the competency statements of terminology that seemed certain to be misunderstood or unknown by parents (for example, the math teachers had to give up "regrouping" for plain, old "borrowing"). All of the competencies for all the grade levels were reproduced in a handbook distributed to every parent in the district. Posters with the appropriate grade-level competencies were placed in every classroom in the district. We have yet to hear from anyone who claims he didn't know about the program or the expectations.

Students are tested twice a year. A mid-year standardized test (the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills) is used as a screening technique for immediate certification of attainment of reading and math competencies for all students at or above grade level. Our assumption is that students scoring at this level have already surpassed the district's minimum competencies, which are written below grade level. In the first year of testing, approximately 65% of the students at each grade level scored at or above grade level. Only those students scoring below grade level are required to take the year-end district criterion-referenced test for certification of minimum competencies. If a student fails in a competency area, we allow that student's teacher to certify that the student does, in fact, have those competencies. The teacher must present a substantial body of regular class work to show that the student has been performing above the competency level for a reasonable period of time. The final decision rests with the school principal. This is not an eleventh-hour cop-out. Rather, it is recognition that testing

is not a perfect science, especially when applied to children in the primary and intermediate grades.

The assessment of writing requires a special word. Beginning with grade 4, we have chosen to assess writing skills by having students write, not by objective tests. We take a writing sample on a given topic from every student. The papers are read by teachers on a districtwide basis. Each paper is given a "holistic" reading and is scored by two teachers. Using specific criteria, each teacher assigns a numerical score to the paper. If there is a difference of greater than two points (on a scale of 0 to 9), a third teacher reads and scores the paper. The two closest scores determine the final evaluation. If a paper is below the competency level, a final reading is made for the purpose of marking a specific diagnosis sheet to be used in remediation. Every teacher in the district has been trained in this process.

Once the Basic-Skills Competency Plan was instituted, we found it necessary to answer the legitimate question, "Is this all you expect of students?" Our answer, of course, was no. This was an attempt to place a floor under every student without placing a ceiling over any student. We reinforced this with the development of district continuums in reading, writing, and arithmetic. These continuums laid out the range of skills for each grade level—well beyond the minimum competency level. It should be added that these continuums did not go the way of most such documents. They were not filed away. Teachers are required to maintain a continuum on each student, mark the skills taught and those *mastered* by the student. At the end of the year, the teacher signs the continuum, presents it to the principal, who reviews and signs it, and then forwards it to the appropriate teacher at the next grade level.

It is worth noting that we intentionally provided for competencies at every grade level and an annual assessment. We wanted no gaps in accountability, either for students or staff.

Remediation and Retention

Promotion is now determined solely on the basis of attainment of the minimum competencies in reading and arithmetic. (At present, students are not retained if they fail only the writing competency.) A

student may not be retained more than twice in grades K through 8. For obvious reasons, most retentions take place in grades 1 through 6. Junior high school students (in our district, grades 7 and 8) who have already been retained twice and are still below competency levels are programmed into special remedial classes. In all cases, the student's competency test data, including clearly identified areas of deficiency, are forwarded to the student's next teacher.

Parents are informed of test results and necessary remediation both by mail and in parent conferences with teachers. Test results, prescribed remediation, and verification of parent conferences are all documented and signed on permanent records that are maintained throughout the student's attendance in our district.

It is one of the bonuses of dealing with problems that a solution in one area invariably suggests a required remedy in a related area. We found very little resistance from parents during competency conferences. In fact, we were surprised by their support. In only one area was there an expression of dissatisfaction: Many had been misled by their child's grades in reading and arithmetic and expected no difficulty on the competency tests. This brought an initiative from staff to develop district criteria for grading in the basic skill areas. Teachers and principals are presently formulating such a policy.

A Specialized High School Graduation Plan

Upon entering high school, students, with the approval of their parents, are required to select one of three curriculum plans: academic, vocational, or general. Each plan carries with it a set of special course requirements beyond the general education courses required of all students. For example, students in the academic plan are required to take additional math and science and a fourth year of English. While a student's choice of plan is not irreversible, any change of plan requires parental consent.

Competency-Based High School Graduation

The annual assessment of competency in reading, writing, and arithmetic begun in grades K through 8 continues during the freshman and sophomore years of high school. However, there is no mid-year standardized test or teacher verification in high school. Com-

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petency is based solely on year-end criterion-referenced tests. Students below competency level in any area are enrolled in an appropriate remedial class following a parent conference.

During the junior year all students are required to take a battery of competency tests in the five general education areas required of all students regardless of their choice of graduation plans. Those areas are English (including both reading and writing), math, social science, science, and health.

If a student fails any area, he is required, following appropriate remediation, to retake the test in his senior year. Exams in all five areas must be passed prior to graduation. No student is granted a diploma without accumulating a specified number of units, completing one of the graduation plans, and passing all competency tests.

As with the K through 8 program, all of these requirements have had wide distribution in student and parent handbooks and on classroom posters.

Taken as a whole, we believe these major components address the student's academic deficiencies.

The Fourth R: Responsibility

Written Student Conduct Codes, K through 6 and 7 through 12

Written student conduct codes setting forth student rights, responsibilities, and specific infractions and their consequences have been developed for grades K through 6 and 7 through 12. The codes are written in very specific terms. Common forms of misconduct are listed and clearly defined. The consequences of a first infraction and repeated infractions are spelled out. The focus is on infractions of school rules. There is no attempt to recite the criminal code. However, it is clearly stated in the codes that acts that are crimes outside of school are considered crimes in school, and they are treated similarly. Obviously, there are differences between the K through 6 and 7 through 12 codes, including appropriate language.

The conduct code handbooks were distributed to every student in the district and included a verification of receipt to be signed by the parents and returned to the school.

"Citizenship Accountability," 7 through 12

The conduct code for grades 7 through 12 includes a provision for evaluating student in-class citizenship. Using uniform guidelines, each teacher assigns a quarterly citizenship mark in addition to the student's academic grade. The guidelines are in areas we wished to treat differently than discipline: tardiness, failure to meet deadlines, coming to class unprepared, failure to complete assignments, etc. Based upon those guidelines, teachers could award a mark of outstanding, acceptable, or unsatisfactory.

If a student receives two or more marks of unsatisfactory in a single quarter, certain privileges, such as participation in athletics, are withheld for the following quarter. Each quarter constitutes a fresh start and students may regain their privileges by improving their citizenship.

There were more than a few teachers who thought that grading citizenship according to such standards was unnecessary, before the system was tested. Their contention was that students wouldn't take it seriously. It took the removal of only a few fullbacks, first trumpeters, song leaders, club presidents, and commencement participants to convince them otherwise. To most, the linking of citizenship to privileges seemed overdue.

Educating for Responsibility, K through 6

If older students are to be held accountable for certain kinds of behavior, it is important that they be given the opportunity to learn and understand that behavior while young. While it was once possible to assume that most students brought certain shared values with them to school, it is no longer so. If we expect the reflection of certain values in students' behavior, we must be certain that they have been exposed to those values.

Toward that end, the elementary curriculum now includes a "character education" program. The instruction deals in a systematic and developmental way with "consensus values": courage and convictions, generosity and kindness, honesty, honor, justice and tolerance, use of time and talents, and others.

By rejecting any further experimentation with "values clarifica-

tion," we did not turn instead to heavy-handed force-feeding. Any fair-minded person who took the time to examine the materials, the objectives, and the manner of presentation would laugh at the charge of indoctrination. The program is simply predicated on the belief that there are still some values upon which all reasonable people can agree.

A Community Consortium for Dealing with Serious Youth Problems

This aspect of the program is still more a hope than a reality. Our criticisms have been better understood than our goals. We have proposed a standing committee of key administrators from the schools, probation department, mental health agency, welfare department, police department, juvenile courts, and other agencies working with the young. The committee's role is to provide a forum for airing present concerns, defining responsibilities, and exploring areas of greater cooperation. The goal is to prevent children from falling into the cracks between a confusing myriad of agencies.

A few meetings have been held, a few gestures made (not all friendly), but we are still a long way from anything like a genuine community consortium.

Those are the broad outlines of our efforts to redefine ourselves and the programs we hope match our rhetoric. We are presently at work on other things. We are in the first stages of a staff development program designed to restore principals as curriculum leaders—principals as "master teachers" who know good teaching when they see it and who are committed to tolerate nothing less. We have negotiated the right to approve courses for salary schedule advancement and will no longer accept credits not directly related to a teacher's classroom assignment. Next year we will begin to train the teachers in our compensatory education schools in the principles of direct instruction.

We are better off than we were and we are going to get much better.

A Final Personal Word

There will be those who finish the final page of this fastback with blood in their eyes. They will have plowed through 10,000 words in search of one they could accept. It may be that they find the contentions antediluvian or simply wrong. Or, it may be that where I see problems they see none. If the former, what answer can I offer? Surely none that would persuade them at this point. If, however, it is that things seem finer from their vantage point, I can only suggest that I live in California where the future comes earlier. And since 10% of all Americans live here, I may be pardoned for my sense of concern and urgency.

To those who have been carried along by the hope of finding some answers, I trust you have not come away empty-handed.

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